



Minutes

English Public Libraries Stakeholder Working Group (EPL)

Date	Tuesday 15 th December 2020
Time	14:00 – 16:00
Location	Virtual Meeting

Present:	Sue Williamson	Director, Libraries, Arts Council England (ACE) (Chair)
	Jenna Birley	Governance and Business Support Officer, Libraries, ACE (Minutes)
	Prof. Steven Broomhead	Chief Executive, Warrington Borough Council
	Julie Griffiths	Halton Chief Executive, Libraries Connected
	Isobel Hunter	Senior Manager, Libraries, ACE
	Sophie Lancaster	Advisor – Culture, Tourism and Sport, Local Government Association (LGA)
	Lauren Lucas	Chief Executive, CILIP, The UK library and information association
	Nick Poole	Head of Public Libraries and Engagement, British Library (BL)
	Liz White	

Apologies: *None received*

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

- 1.1 Sue Williamson welcomed everyone to the meeting and members thanked Julie Griffiths for attending on behalf of the Heads of Service Sounding Board.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 There were no interests to declare.

3. FINANCIAL RESILIENCE UPDATE

- 3.1 Nick Poole provided an update on CILIP's financial resilience project. It was noted that the advisory panel had almost been fully recruited and that CILIP wanted the EPL members to act as a reference group for the library sector.
- 3.2 Nick informed EPL that CILIP had two staff members to manage the project and will be looking to contract out for the independent financial assessment shortly.
- 3.3 It was noted that the project was approximately three weeks behind schedule but that the aim was still to have the work concluded by February 2021.
- 3.4 Members asked about the practicalities of engaging with EPL when required to feedback on aspects of the project. It was decided that a further update would be provided at the next EPL meeting on 9th February 2021 and that it may be necessary to have further engagement with the group via email in the meantime.
- 3.5 Members asked Nick to consider using the Heads of Service sounding board to test recommendations/headline findings.
- 3.6 Members asked for clarity on the intention of the proposed concluding report. Nick Poole confirmed it is intended to act as a roadmap with prioritised recommendations for the short, medium and long term.
- 3.7 EPL thanked Nick for the update and he agreed to send the updated project timeline to Sue Williamson so key points of engagement could be identified.

4. LIBRARIES DEVELOPMENT TEAM UPDATE

- 4.1 Sue Williamson provided EPL with an update on the status of Arts Council England's Libraries Development Team which had been scheduled to cease on 31 March 2021.

Action

Nick Poole

- 4.2 Sue informed members that the team had been extended in their posts until the end of June 2021.
- 4.3 Sue asked members to consider the direction of travel for EPL and whether they felt it would be useful to continue to their meetings and development plans.
- 4.4 Members agreed that EPL is a useful forum and they wished to continue to work together strategically for the benefit of the English public library sector. They also thought it would be useful to look into how best to continue dialogue with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) on key library issues.

**Sue
Williamson**

5. ENGLISH PUBLIC LIBRARY STRATEGY

- 5.1 Sue Williamson introduced this item which had come out of a conversation CILIP had had with DCMS regarding a strategy for public libraries in England.
- 5.2 Sue asked members to consider the related draft document which provided headline statements of the strategy's aims.
- 5.3 It was noted that the document should be cross referenced with Libraries Connected's blueprint work to ensure it included commitments to develop the sector's workforce and leadership. The document also needed to read across to the British Library's work on the single digital presence.
- 5.4 Members felt it would be beneficial to have a single document to articulate a plan for public libraries rather than several circulating frameworks, though it was noted that it may have to be amended to suit certain audiences.
- 5.5 It was agreed that an introductory/context setting paragraph and the inclusion of a visual representation of the ongoing work to accompany the strategy document could be helpful.
- 5.6 Sue agreed to rework the draft to align it with the feedback received.

**Sue
Williamson**

6. ASSESSMENT STRATEGY UPDATE

- 6.1 Sophie Lancaster provided EPL with an update on the assessment strategy development since the last meeting.
- 6.2 Members were asked to consider the draft strategic objectives and risks that would form the basis of a project initiation document and ensure it properly reflected the direction of travel EPL wished the project to take.

- 6.3 EPL commented that the objectives should include a way to provide support for public libraries and their staff to gather data, including provision of appropriate training.
- 6.4 It was noted that some of the language in the document needed rephrasing in order to better reflect the relationships public libraries have with their key stakeholders.
- 6.5 EPL noted the importance of early engagement and consultation with Heads of Service in order to ensure the success of the assessment strategy. Members suggested Libraries Connected's Basecamp network as a potential tool for engagement.
- 6.6 Members discussed the need for accompanying communications to articulate the purpose of the assessment strategy, what it was going to look at, how objectives will be achieved and why now is the time to do this work.
- 6.7 It was agreed that the document be revised according to feedback received, and for further development of the strategy and document to describe context as to the reasons behind it.

**Sophie
Lancaster**

7. BIG TECH DISCUSSION

- 7.1 Sue Williamson introduced this item and asked for EPL's views on partnership working between 'Big Tech' and the public library sector.
- 7.2 EPL discussed the risks of working in partnership with 'Big Tech' companies, including the one it poses to the integral nature of neutrality that is part of the national library offer. Members felt a way to mitigate this would be to ensure complete transparency in any partnership working.
- 7.3 Members commented that any partnerships have to clearly demonstrate value for money and align to library sector values. Perspective areas of library work that would benefit from partnering with tech companies included enabling better connectivity, superfast broadband and investigating online safety issues.
- 7.4 It was also noted that libraries need to be provided with fit-for-purpose hardware and training if they are going to deliver something outside of their usual offer.
- 7.5 Members discussed the benefits to companies that would be interested in working with library services. It was noted that libraries have a lot to offer in that they are trusted, community-centric institutions that have in-depth knowledge of the public they serve. They also capture user data

which could be the motivating factor for 'Big Tech' companies to work with them.

- 7.6 The group discussed the potential for private companies to fund/work with public libraries to establish them as data trusts, as had been done in Toronto, Canada.
- 7.7 They also discussed whether it would be possible to ringfence income generated by fines to large corporations who breach data security laws to put back into work on data safety and/or digital literacy as an offset programme.
- 7.8 Sue thanked EPL members for their views on the subject.

8. CML STATEMENT

- 8.1 Sue Williamson introduced the draft CML statement in which she had drawn together the position of EPL members into one document to reflect a shared position.
- 8.2 Members discussed the purpose of the document. It was noted that the original purpose behind it was to have a shared position that, if individual EPL members were queried on their position regarding CMLs, they would have one document to draw a response from, to which all members had agreed.
- 8.3 EPL recognised the achievement in coming together as collaborative partners to agree a shared position on CMLs.
- 8.4 Members felt the statement needed shortening and should have certain sentences removed (such as the tie-in with the levelling up agenda) so as to avoid it becoming dated.
- 8.5 EPL discussed the gap in research regarding CMLs, particularly work to examine sustainability, access and inclusion of the network. This was noted as something to potentially pick up in the future as part of the national strategy for libraries development. It was also noted that such work could be useful as a guidance document for Local Authorities.
- 8.6 Although this document could not act as an officially issued statement as it had not gone through members' individual approval processes, it was noted that it could be used to advance a shared way of working for the future.
- 8.7 Sue thanked EPL for their feedback and agreed to redraft the statement and circulate by email.

**Sue
Williamson**

9. SUPPORTING LIBRARIES IN CRISIS

- 9.1 Members discussed how they could work to assist library services as they plan for recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 9.2 EPL noted that it would be essential for their individual organisations to converse with local authorities in a way that was supportive and informative to assist them in rebuilding their services.
- 9.3 It was also noted that there was a need for a national, as well as a local, approach to advice sharing and giving.
- 9.4 EPL members discussed the need for deeper engagement to be able to intervene and advise Local Authorities and library services more effectively and that there may be a need to resource this through their own organisations.
- 9.5 It was suggested that EPL agree a coordinated response when a local authority makes one of the membership organisations aware of their intention to amend their library provisions.
- 9.6 Members agreed to feedback further thoughts on how to do this and what they would hope to achieve by email.

All

10. MARKETING DISCUSSION

- 10.1 Sue Williamson introduced this item which informed EPL of a piece of work being undertaken by Libraries Connected.
- 10.2 Isobel Hunter informed members that Libraries Connected were funding two pilot projects looking at a marketing strategy for public libraries. It was hoped that the projects would produce toolkits and resources for library services to use to enhance their own marketing knowledge and strategies.
- 10.3 Members noted the update and were supportive of the pilots.

11. EDUCATION AND SKILLS – ROLE FOR LIBRARIES

- 11.1 Lauren Lucas provided EPL with an update on the recent webinar that had taken place as part of the Arts Council/LGA Improvement Programme and had focussed on libraries' ability to deliver on council agendas on education and skills.
- 11.2 Lauren informed EPL that the LGA were considering establishing a sounding board comprised of council leaders to help shape local authority strategy and policy in the future.

11.3 Lauren agreed to feedback to EPL on the upcoming session on crisis communications.

**Lauren
Lucas**

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

12.1 Sophie Lancaster had provided the group with data on rural and urban library mapping for their information.

12.2 Sophie had also provided an activity map to show all the national library-related work the group was aware of and how separate strands of work were linked.

Date and location of next meeting: Tuesday 9th February 2021, 14:00 – 16:00, Virtual Meeting